

## GENDER SOLIDARITY IN THE NOVELS OF TONI

### MORRISON AND ALICE WALKER

**DR. KIRAN BADONI MAMGAIN**

*Assistant Professor, DIT University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India*

#### ABSTRACT

*The term gender-solidarity refers to a bond among a particular gender. In this article, the focus is on unity among the females from all castes and classes present in the novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Some of the characters of the novels find this phenomenon a part of their lives because all of them face the same biasness in the family, society, and everywhere.*

*Toni Morrison and Alice Walker both have written a lot about the women-women relationship. Most of the protagonists of their novels are let down by their respective patriarchal societies, they are told that they are secondary and sub-standard which brings them closer to each other.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Women's Relationships, Female Friendship, Female Bonding, Sisterhood, Female Solidarity & Female Empowerment*

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#### INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison and Alice Walker both have written a lot about the women-women relationship. Most of the protagonists of their novels have a similar background. Since both writers cultural similarity there is an autobiographical element found in their characterization.

Like in Morrison's *Sula* and Walker's *The Color Purple*, Sula and Celie both have a similar culture and family background. They have been brought up in the same society and they have faced the similar kind of difficulties, due to which the respective protagonists reach to somewhat similar fates.

Talking about Female friendship, it is a non-sexual relationship between women based on giving and receiving emotional and moral support, sharing stories and experiences, caring and nurturing each other. This practice of relationship may occur between any women and does not essentially involve sibling or mother-daughter relationships.

#### GENDER SOLIDARITY: MEANING AND RELEVANCE

The term Gender Solidarity means a connection on the basis of gender. It focusses on the Empathy that one woman can have for another woman because both of them have similar joys and sorrows because nature has made them similar. Both have equal family and societal value. which is most of the times very less.

The relevance of the concept of solidarity among a gender arises from the situations where the women knowingly don't want to understand the perspective of other woman and do not extend a helping hand to their

fraternity.

Clenora Hudson-Weems, who coined a term *Africana Womanism* in 1980, calls it sisterhood and defines such bonding in the following words-

*“This particular kind of sisterhood refers specifically to a relationship between women who confide in each other and willingly share their true feelings, their fears, their hopes, and their dreams. Enjoying, understanding, and supporting each other, women friends of this sort are invaluable to each other. With such love, trust and security, it is difficult to imagine any woman without such a genuine support system as that found in genuine sisterhood.”*

Clenora Hudson-Weems

## MORRISON’S PROTAGONISTS AND GENDER SOLIDARITY

A strong connection among the female characters in the writings of Toni Morrison has been observed in various instances. The first to name is *Sula*, where the bonding is between Sula and Nel.

Sula and Nel have been brought up in the same neighborhood and attended the same school. They were living in the Bottom, a society named from a joke, they form a bond. This bonding allowed them to combat the force of patriarchal cruelty and helps them take care of their common wounds. They listen to each other, counsel each other and fight for each other.

This empathy between Sula and Nel gives them the chance to attain a harmonious connection with oneself and others, which empowers them in the visage of most of the emotional challenges.

The novel exhibits in what way female friendship helps these women face challenges related to race, class and gender domination. As evident in the novel, a female bonding ascertains support to these young girls because it gives them an occasion to share experiences, give and take counseling, care for and secure each other. Eventually, Sula and Nel's girlhood friendship is so powerful that they feel like that they are one, their happiness and sadness has the common roots.

Undoubtedly this strong relationship benefits them both. Sula and Nel's friendship not only allows them to give power to each other, but it also helps them build up a new sense of self.

However, in *Sula*, the friendship of two also has the change during adulthood when Nel is disappointed with the closeness of Sula with her husband. But twenty-five years after Sula's death, Nel realizes that she has wasted all of her opportunities for self-discovery and happiness. In Nel's final moments with Sula, Morrison calls into question the priority of Nel's marriage over her friendship with Sula. One of the keys to this novel is that friendship supersedes even marriage. Nel finally understands this truth years later when she visits the graveside of her soul mate:

*“All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude . . .*

*O Lord, Sula . . . girl, girl, girl girl girl”*

Similarly in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* Celie shares a woman- bonding with her sister Nettie. While they have their respective miseries they write letters to each other and share their problems. Walker makes great use of female solidarity in her novel which constitutes a base for female defiance. Bethel mentions that the women in the country have formed a type of oral literature and folk culture which is based on female solidarity and close bonding as a way to defy both sexist and oppressive society.

## CONCEPT OF GENDER SOLIDARITY AND WOMEN- EMPOWERMENT

What is the need for Gender Solidarity? Why do the women need to be together for each other ?

Answering such questions is very easy. There are end number of cases where the hatred for women is exhibited by men in various forms. Violence, Abuse, Rape are few examples of misogamy. In such an environment where men are not being compatible or friendly for a woman, the instrument of Gender Solidarity can be a great help for women – empowerment.

In this study *Gynocriticism* is a relevant term which is a socio-historical investigation that explores literature from the historical perspective, subject matter, genres, and structure of literature by women in order to design a method of analyzing literature written by women and to create models of interpretation fashioned on female experience, instead of adopting male interpretive theoretical models.

A consciousness-raising move directs the victim of subjugation to question the patriarchy which is seen in the form of sisterhood and friendship in these novels. Here the novelists depict the efficacy of black women's relationship with one another to provide a platform for their activism and self-determination.

Therefore one woman's consciousness of another's situation and then making an effort to correct such a situation through bonding is essential for Black, in fact, any woman's personal augmentation and survival.

## CONCLUSIONS

As Morrison and Walker are both black writers, they emphasized that to be a black woman is much more different than to be a woman. Not only Walker's novel *The Color Purple* but also Morrison's novels *Sula* have presented how Black women could survive in hard conditions. Both of the writers demonstrated the African-American women's life vividly and the characters in their novels have suffered beyond what one can think a human being can endure. Reading these important works; one can see the reasons why black women suffer and the problems that black women face.

To mention *The Color Purple* knowing the position in the black dominated society, Shug Avery acts independently and warns Celie not to be dependent on black males. Similarly, Mr.\_'s sister, Kate also advises Celie about fighting.

*"You got to fight them, Celie, she says. I can't do it for you. You got to fight them for yourself"* (Walker, 1985: 21).

Nevertheless, Celie is afraid of black males' brutality and states

*"I think about Nettie, dead. She fights, she runs away.*

*What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive"* (21). )

These women create bonds; they may not even realize the feminist principles, but their experiences or environmental conditions take them towards female solidarity. In exploring the social and psychological contexts and implications of friendships, these texts contribute to an understanding of African and African-American women particular and women in general.

Similarly, Hooks states, —We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning and value of Sisterhood (Feminist Theory 43). Hooks encourages women to believe in female friendship and understand its significance and the wellbeing it can provide them. Nel and Sula adheres to Hooks' philosophy since they share joys and sorrows, and they not only sympathize with each other, they also empathize.

The Indian women are comparatively fortunate and as Manusmriti says

***“Yatra Naryastu Pujyante Ramante Tatra Devatah”***

There are many organizations who work on the theory of women-women relationship. Two examples are very apt in this regard. The first is India's *Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM)* is a collection of women scientists in ISRO. The image of sari-clad, flower-adorned; lady-next-door scientists gave most of us that immensely warm, fuzzy feeling. The most ironic thing – it was the very first time we were seeing a visual of women in science in India.



**Figure 1: Women Scientists in ISRO Celebrating the Success of the Mission**

The second example is *The Gulabi Gang* or *Pink' Gang* which is an extraordinary women's movement formed in 2006 by Mrs. Sampat Pal Devi in the Banda District of Uttar Pradesh in Northern India. This region is one of the poorest districts in the country and is marked by a deeply patriarchal culture, rigid caste divisions, female illiteracy, domestic violence, child labor, child marriages, and dowry demands. The women's group is popularly known as Gulabi or 'Pink' Gang because the members wear bright pink saris and wield bamboo sticks.



**Figure 2**

Mrs. Sampat says, “We are not a gang in the usual sense of the term, we are a gang for justice.” The Gulabi Gang was initially intended to punish oppressive husbands, fathers, and brothers, and combat domestic violence and desertion. The members of the gang would accost male offenders and prevail upon them to see reason. The more serious offenders

were publicly shamed when they refused to listen or relent. Sometimes the women resorted to their lathis if the men resorted to using of force.

Similar cooperative workforce can be seen in Africa, For instance, where women's associations work principally to offer economic freedom to women. They comprehend that they have to work in accord, serenity, and harmony in order to achieve their dreams. This cooperative dedication to the same purpose results in a strong sisterhood that benefits not only the women themselves but also the society as a whole. This form of female friendship works well because, in addition to compassionate and fostering, the material aspect keeps relations strong and eliminates or minimizes pecuniary reliance on men.

When we talk about the woman taken as a secondary gender and sometimes less preferred the women-women relationship becomes a safety-valve to rescue the second sex. Whether it is about the protagonists of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker in particular or any other woman in general. The study can conclude that if the women stop depending upon men and start supporting each other as women, the picture can be changed at a positive, constructive and universal level.

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